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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE25 June 1985
EDT 1630

SPOT COMMENTARY: Hijacking Update

In an apparent response to reports that the US plans to pursue measures aimed at closing Beirut airport, Amal announced today that it would turn the hostages over to the Shia extremists who hijacked the TWA airliner if the US imposes a "siege" on West Beirut.

- Nabih Barri increasingly finds himself in a no-win situation as his efforts to score points with the US and at the same time gain domestic political capital out of the hostage crisis turn sour.
- Barri could seize on a US-sponsored embargo of West Beirut as a face-saving means to withdraw from the hostage affair and place full responsibility for the fate of the hostages on US actions.

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The US Embassy in Damascus believes the the TWA hijacking was high on the agenda in yesterday's discussions between Syrian President Assad and Iranian Consultative Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani.

- The Embassy noted that Rafsanjani seized the occasion of a press conference to deny any Iranian involvement with the hijacking, but he did not give the slightest hint of condemnation and no indication of making any effort to resolve the crisis.

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Damascus is concerned that the radical Shia challenge to the leadership of Nabih Barri seriously undermines Syrian efforts to effect a Lebanese political settlement.

- The Embassy speculates that the challenge to Barri which is crystallizing around the TWA affair is likely to impel Assad to act.
- The problem is that while Syria has leverage with Barri, Barri has no leverage with Hizballah. Moreover, Syrian options for influencing Hizballah and Iran are limited. Syria could constrain Hizballah activities in the Bekaa Valley or disrupt Iranian resupply efforts through Syria. Dramatic action by Assad, however, could unleash a fundamentalist backlash against the Syrian regime.

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-- The Embassy believes that Assad spoke "forthrightly" to Rafsanjani on the hostage issue. The last thing Syria wants is for this crisis to be dragged out for months with continued prominence being given to Hizballah. [redacted]

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According to press reports, the two Lebanese Shia on trial in Spain for attempting to assassinate a Libyan diplomat have been sentenced to 23 years in prison. The two are among those whose freedom is being demanded by the TWA hijackers.

* { -- Spanish authorities have said that they may be willing to make formal arrangements with the Lebanese government to allow the two convicted Lebanese to serve most of their sentences in Lebanon, an arrangement that may well equate to setting the two free. [redacted]

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DDI Working Group on TWA Hijacking

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My God!
We should
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